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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 002207

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2019

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SUBJECT: THAILAND: DEMOCRAT PARTY PREVAILS IN SOUTHERN
BY-ELECTION BATTLE OF YOUNGER BROTHERS

REF: A. BANGKOK 1541 (THAKSIN SUPPORTER WINS BY-ELECTION)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 1491 (BELWETHER BY-ELECTION)

Classified By: POL Counselor George Kent, reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) According to unofficial results reported in the Thai media, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's governing Democrat party won a resounding victory in an August 30 House of Representatives by-election in the southern province of Surat Thani. Democrat candidate Thani Thaugsuban -- Deputy PM Suthep Thaugsuban's younger brother -- reportedly received 122,032 votes, easily outpacing the opposition Puea Thai leader's younger brother, candidate Sompol Vichaidit, who was the runner-up with 24,624 votes. There were only a few reports of minor procedural irregularities on election-day. Turnout was low by Thai standards, with just under 48 percent of the eligible voters opting to cast a ballot.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: While hardly unexpected, the sheer size of the victory nevertheless served to boost Democrat party morale following emphatic Puea Thai party victories during June by-elections in northeastern Thailand (Reftels). The Surat Thani victory proved that just as Puea Thai retains the ability to defend its turf, the Democrats are similarly capable of controlling their traditional electoral stronghold in the south. Thani Thaugsuban will now fill his brother's seat in the House; DPM Suthep chose to step down in July rather than fight an Election Commission indictment for owning shares in Thai telecommunications firm True, in contravention of the law which prohibits MP ownership of shares in telecom firms with state concessions (note: Suthep had sold the shares in 2008, after being elected but before joining the Cabinet in December 2008).

[1](#)3. (C) Comment, cont: Thani Thaugsuban's victory also served to further underscore the Democrat party's continued appeal in southern Thailand at a time of increasing uncertainty and internecine bickering within the Democrat party camp. PM Abhisit actively campaigned in Surat Thani for Thani Thaugsuban, as did DPM Suthep. Even the solidly Democrat south is pluralistic, however. While Puea Thai and the red-shirt street protest movement are known for their north and northeast power bases, PT leader Yongyuth is from the south, as are four of the main United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship "red-shirt" leaders: Vira Musikapong, Jatuporn Promphan, Nattawut Saikua, and Jaran Dittaphichai.

